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RADICAL REVOLUTIONARIES: THE GERMAN FORTY-EIGHTERS' LABOR POLITICS, EXTRALEGAL ACTION, AND INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM

Nathan Rickard

Mentor: Venus Bivar

My project examines the lives of the Forty-Eighters—a group of socialist revolutionaries who instigated the 1848-49 revolutions in the German-speaking territories before immigrating to the United States and organizing as radical abolitionists. This project confronts two disparate strands of historical narrative. First, this project begins with a challenge to the traditional views of the revolutions of 1848-49, particularly through the lens of the German revolutions, to highlight the radicalism undergirding the movement. Then I build on this radicalized version of the German revolutions to disrupt the singularity of American history in the mid-nineteenth century as independent of the people's revolutions happening throughout the world and insert the international influence of such radicalism in the American Civil War. Broadly, this paper destabilizes notions of who contributed to the revolutionary class by redefining political engagement. Rather than focusing on a narrowly defined political class or the biographies of prominent, known revolutionaries, I examine the large classes implicated in the social revolution. As a history of grassroots movements, this project attempts to provide voices to the voiceless and reinstate the role of the lower- and working-classes that once were commonly recognized within the historiography of the 1848-49 revolutions but have long been absent from the narrative of the Civil War for its subversion of acceptable American political practices. A social history of the 1848-49 movements in the German-speaking territories provides the necessary background to reimagine the United States Civil War as a part of the international social revolutionary age encompassing much of the mid-nineteenth century.